

March 22, 2010

Washington, D.C. – Today, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) continued his advocacy for increased benefits for our nation's veterans by supporting and helping to pass the End Veteran Homelessness Act of 2010 and the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act. The Congressman, who recently brought together hundreds of Veterans and more than 70 organizations offering assistance at his fourth annual Veterans Summit, backed these bills as an important part of his efforts to ensure that our former service members receive the assistance they deserve and the opportunities they have earned in the civilian world.

"We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the brave men and women who wore the cloth of this nation and to the families that supported them," said the Congressman. "Our government has not always fairly recognized their service, such as when thousands of Veterans who could not afford healthcare were ruled ineligible for the VA system in 2003. We have done better in the last few years and I am particularly proud of the work Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner and I did to make it possible for many of these "Priority 8" Veterans to now enroll in that VA system. However, there is much work to be done. These bills, which combat the crisis in which more Veterans are ending up on the streets and ensure fair health benefits for our Veterans, are another significant step toward ensuring all our Veterans receive the benefits they have earned."

Specifically, the End Veteran Homelessness Act of 2010 increases to \$200 million, from \$150 million, the annual authorization for the Veterans Affairs Department (VA) to carry out comprehensive service programs for homeless veterans. Additionally, the bill requires each VA medical center that provides treatment and services under the Housing and Urban

Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) voucher program to employ or provide one or more housing specialists to conduct landlord outreach. This outreach would include activities that encourage and facilitate the landlords' participation in the HUD-VASH program, the mediation of disputes between veterans and landlords, and the establishment and maintenance of a list of available rental units.

Last month, the Congressman introduced the "Expanded Housing for America's Veterans Act" (H.R. 4569). This legislation would amend participant funding contribution requirements for housing vouchers under the HUD-VASH program from a maximum of 30 percent of a family's monthly adjusted income to a maximum 25 percent of the family's monthly adjusted income.

"The astounding estimate that one in every four homeless is a veteran is a tragic legacy of years of inadequate attention to the economic, educational, and health security of our returning warriors," said Congressman Sestak. "When our Vietnam Veterans came home, we did not give them the care they deserved and the resources they needed to transition into civilian life. Now, as veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan are ending up on the streets at a higher rate than those of any previous conflict, we cannot afford to repeat the sins of the past, and neglect another generation returning from war. It is time that we honor their service and reward their sacrifice, by providing veterans with the education, housing, medical care, and jobs that they need -- and earned, wearing the uniform of the United States of America."

To increase the amount paid to Veterans for disability compensation, and to their survivors for dependency and indemnity compensation, Congressman Sestak cosponsored the House version of and helped pass the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2009 (S. 407). Each year, Congress reviews Veterans' service-connected disability compensation, as well as dependency and indemnity compensation programs for surviving spouses and dependent children, to make sure that such benefits provide reasonable and adequate compensation. The Veterans Affairs (VA) Department estimates that it will provide disability compensation under the Act to more than 3 million Veterans with service-connected disabilities in Fiscal Year 2009. Among the Veterans estimated to receive such compensation are two World War I Veterans; 267,250 World War II veterans; 157,690 Korean-conflict veterans; 1,031,410 Vietnam-era veterans; 956,090 veterans of the Persian Gulf War era; and 602,399 veterans who served during peacetime. The VA currently rates the disabilities on a graduated scale ranging from 10 percent to 100 percent, in 10 percent increments, and the bill allows a Veteran with a disability rated at 30 percent or greater to receive additional compensation on behalf of the Veteran's spouse, children, and dependent parents.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.

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